

BUDDHISM AS BRAHMANISM

In earlier as well as later Indian Buddhist sources we can often read, that the *śramaṇa* Gautama is identified with *Brahmā* (m.) or *Mahābrahmā*, that his *Dharma* is identified with *Brahman* (n.), that he and his monks - those that follow the true *mārga* - are the true *brahmans*, in other words that the *ratnatraya* is the true form of Brahmanism. Furthermore, *Brahman* and *Nirvāṇa* are used as synonyms (not just in Buddhist texts), the Buddha is said to know the Veda(s), and the purpose of following his teaching about *Dharma* (*dharmadeśanā*) is to become one with *Brahman*¹.

In a passage in the old *Suttanipāṭa* (11.7) some wealthy *brahmans* ask *Bhagavat*: "Do *brahmans* now, Gotama, live in conformity with the brahmanical lore of the *brahmans* of old?" "No, *brahmans*, *brahmans* now do not live in conformity with the brahmanical lore of the *brahmans* of old". "Then let the venerable Gotama tell us about the *brahmanical* lore of the *brahmans* of old, if

¹ This essay addresses itself to readers already familiar with the sources, and notes and ref. are therefore kept at a bare minimum.- On Buddhism as Brahmanism, see recently J.-U. HARTMANN, *Das Varṇārḥavarṇastotra des Mātṛceṭa*, Göttingen, 1987, pp. 215-231 with ref. to the earlier contributions by Geiger, Schrader, Bhattacharya.- The ideal was "companionship with *Brahman/Brahmā*", cf. F. O. SCHRADER, *Kleine Schriften*, Wiesbaden, 1983, p. 49. - Note that even the "triple protection" offered by Buddhism has Vedic roots, see F.W. WEILER, "The Buddhist Act of Compassion", in *Indological Studies in Honor of W. Norman Brown*, New Haven, 1962, p. 241.

it is not too much trouble for him". "Then listen, *brahmans*, pay careful attention. I shall tell you"².

There are, of course, numerous scriptural passages to the same effect: That Gautama was considered (and considered himself) an authority on matters of *Brahman*, that he, in other words, was considered a Vedic scholar. The Buddha, in short, is the true *Brahmā*, who teaches about the true *Brahman* to his disciples, the true *brahmans*. If this is historically true, one can in this sense claim that ancient Buddhism is reformed Brahmanism³.

The purpose of this paper is to establish this thesis from various independent angles by a method that could perhaps be described as "spiritual palaeontology"; or, as an evolutionist, one might prefer to speak of "mental phylogeny". The main task is to explore and pin down the historical context in which Gautama (the historical or mythical) developed what the sources transmit to us as being fundamental Buddhist ideas.

In the Beginning

I am tempted to start with the exaggeration that the entire body of Buddhist *sūtras* can be seen as one huge commentary and elaboration of a few Vedic passages, the most important of which is undoubtedly RV 10.129, the celebrated cosmogonic hymn from *Prajāpati Parameṣṭhin*:⁴

² Translation by K. R. NORMAN, *The Rhinoceros Horn*, London, 1985, p. 49. – For the ancient canonical texts the editions of the Pāli Text Society (PTS) are used. Further ref. in CPD = *A Critical Pāli Dictionary*, Copenhagen, 1924-; and PED = *The Pāli Text Society's Pāli-English Dictionary*, London, 1972; also SWTF = *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch der buddhistischen Texte aus den Turfan-Funden*, Göttingen 1973-; and EDGERTON's BHSD.

³ Cf. e.g. the *Varṇaśatam*, an eulogy of one hundred *epitheta* of the Buddha, ed. in E. WALDSCHMIDT, *Ausgewählte Kleine Schriften*, Stuttgart, 1989, pp. 329-345. Interesting from our point of view are: *agraprāpta*, *iṣisattama*, *gambhīra*, *trāividyā*, *dharmastha*, *brahmaprāpta*, *sugata* - Buddha is the "true *brahman*".

⁴ The most recent and convenient edition: B. A. van Nooten, G. B. Holland (eds.), *Rig Veda. A metrically restored text*, Cambridge, Mass. 1994, p. 554.- The philosophically interesting hymns have often been discussed, cf. e.g. R. ROCHER (ed.), *India and Indology. Selected articles by W. Norman Brown*, Delhi, 1978, pp. 5-89.

1. *nāsad āsīn nō sād āsīt tadānīm nāsīd rájo nō víomā paró yāt /
kīm āvarīvaḥ kúha kásya śármann ámbhaḥ kīm āsīd gáhanam
gabhīram //*
2. *ná mṛtyúr āsīd amṛtaṃ ná tárhi ná rátriya āhna āsīt praketaḥ /
ānīd avātāṃ svadhāyā tát ékaṃ tásmād dhānyān ná parāḥ kīm
canāsa //*
3. *tāma āsīt támasā gūlham ágre apraketaṃ salilam sárvam ā idam /
tuchyénābhū ápihitaṃ yád āsīt tápasas tán mahinājyātaikam //*
4. *kāmas tát ágre sám avartatādhi mánaso rétah prathamam yád
āsīt /
sató bāndhum ásati nír avindan hṛdí pratīsyā kaváyo manīṣā //*
5. *tiraścīno vitato raśmír eṣām adháḥ svid āsīd upári svid āsīt /
retodhā āsan mahimāna āsan svadhā avástāt práyatiḥ parástāt //*
6. *kó addhā veda ká ihā prá vocat kúta ājātā kúta iyām víṣṣṭiḥ /
arvāg devā asyá víśarjanena áthā kó veda yáta ābabhūva //*
7. *iyām víṣṣṭir yáta ābabhūva yádi vā dadhé yádi vā ná /
yó asyādhyakṣaḥ paramé víoman só āngá veda yádi vā ná véda //*

It is entirely immaterial to our purpose that some of these lines are probably as obscure to us as they were to the ancient Indians. The important facts are these:

To begin with, before *sat* and *asat*, there "was" *tad ekam*; it is *gahanam gabhīram* - a gap ginnunge, Greek *Chaos*. The "elements" are not yet manifest. But then *kāma* and *manas* become active, and *sat* and *asat* become manifest. The world, everything, is created. Somehow the solution to the mystery of creation/evolution can be known in one's heart.

Indologists early recognised the general importance of this hymn for the study of later Indian philosophy. Geldner pointed out some relevant passages from Vedic literature: "*Dieses Eine fürwahr (ékaṃ vā idam) hat sich zu dem All (idam sarvam) entwickelt*" (RV 8.58.2); "*Das Eine (ekam) enthalt alles, was sich bewegt und was feststeht, was geht und fliegt; verschiedenartig hat es sich entwickelt*" (3.54.8); "*Das, was nur ein Eines ist (ekam sat), benennen die Sprachkundigen (vipra) vielfach*" (1.164.46). In 10.82.6 *ekam* is said to rest in the navel of the unborn (*aja*), and in

1.164.6 *ekam* is *ajasya rūpe*. The unborn reality is thus an ancient Vedic idea⁵.

So, already in the *Rgveda* (RV) the "reality" of something "unborn", the One, profoundly beyond being and nonbeing is acknowledged as the ultimate source of the universe, or the "world".

Later *tad ekam* was identified with *Brahman* (n.), and that *Brahman*, again, was recognised as having two forms. A very early and very explicit passage to this effect is *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad* 2.3.1: *dve vāva Brahmaṇo rūpe mūrtaṁ caivāmūrtaṁ ca martyaṁ cāmūrtaṁ ca*. *Brahman* has two forms, a bodily and a bodiless, a mortal and an immortal⁶.

When the supreme god (if we can use that expression), though bodiless and immortal, spontaneously manifested himself/itself in a bodily and mortal form (*rūpa*), the technical term used for his physical form was *Bhagavat* (from *bhaga* and *vat*). Whereas the term *bhaga* is often used of the Vedic gods (*Indra*, *Agni*, et al.) *bhaga-vat* has not yet obtained the technical meaning that later on applies to virtually any immortal that spontaneously appears in a mortal frame. (We are here at the source of the later avatar theory).

When we therefore in later literature come across such phrases as *Buddho bhagavā*, *Viṣṇur bhagavān*, *Kapilo bhagavān*, etc. etc. it would be very misleading simply to treat *bhagavān* as a mere honorific term, for it in fact reflects an original idea of the two distinct forms of *Brahman*. This then means that the common phrase *Buddho bhagavān* should not just be translated "The Lord Buddha", or the like, but: Buddha in his manifest, mortal, form. Implicit is here the idea of two forms of the Buddha.

I shall revert to this fundamental point but first I shall take up a few related matters.

⁵ Ref. to K. F. GELDNER, *Der Rigveda in Auswahl*, Stuttgart, 1907-09. – Since *aja* is thus Vedic, the Mahāyāna doctrine of *ajāti-samātā*, *anutpāda*, etc. obviously has ancient roots. See e.g. O. QVARNSTRÖM, *Hindu Philosophy in Buddhist Perspective*, Lund, 1989, p. 24 etc.

⁶ Pointed out e.g. by V. FAUSBØLL, *Fire Forstudier til en Fremstilling af den indiske Mythologi efter Mahābhārata*, København, 1897, pp. 1-21. See also his *Indian Mythology*, London, 1902, pp. 57-75. A work of good common sense.

Going beyond sat and asat

Programmatic not just of *Madhyamaka* but of *Mahāyāna* and to some extent also of early Buddhism is the first verse of Nāgārjuna's *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā*.⁷

*astināstivvyatikrāntā buddhir yeṣāṃ nirāśrayā /
gambhīras tair nirālambaḥ pratyayārtho vibhāvyate //*

There is something (here termed *pratyayārtha*, to which we shall also come back), which is *gambhīra* and it can be developed, or realised, by those whose *buddhi* (a synonym of *dhī*, *mati*, *prajñā* and the like) has gone beyond *asti* and *nāsti*, elsewhere commonly expressed as *sat* and *asat*.

Like the poet of RV 10.129 the great *ācārya* of *Mahāyāna* is concerned, from the very start, with the Profound beyond *sat* and *asat*. Being a learned Sanskritist and *brahman* before converting to *Mahāyāna*, it goes without saying that he would have known this Vedic hymn by heart.

This concern can be traced back to the earliest canonical Buddhist scriptures. Most important in this regard is the *Brahmajāla-sūtra*, the authority of which *Mahāyāna* authors often refer to⁸. (The text is still available in Pāli, Tibetan, Mongolian, Chinese and Sanskrit fragments.) In a recurring old formula, the author (compiler) assures us that he is here concerned with certain profound principles (*dhammā gambhīrā*) etc., *ye Tathāgato sayam abhiññā*

⁷ Quoted from my *Nagarjuniana*, Copenhagen, 1982, p.102. Further ref. to many of the sources here discussed may be found in my book from 1982. - For *gambhīra* (said of *śasanāmṛta*, *dharma*, *tattva*), see *Ratnāvalī* 1.62, 74, 75, MK XXIV.9). Also *dharma* is *duravagāha*, deep as the ocean (MK XXIV.12).

⁸ There are often ref. to the *Brahmajālasūtra* in the works of the major *Mahāyāna* philosophers, see O. QVARNSTRÖM, *op. cit.*, p. 98; F. O. SCHRADER, *op. cit.*, *passim*; J. MAY, *Candrakīrti. Prasannapadā Madhyamakavṛtti*, Paris, 1959, pp. 277-298. - For the various versions, see F. WELLER, *Kleine Schriften 1-2*, Stuttgart 1987. (Unfortunately, the Tib. and Mong. version, publ. Leipzig, 1934, are not included in the reprint.). Sanskrit fragments (§ 81-93, 155, 168) were ed. by J.-U. HARTMANN, Göttingen 1989 and 1992.

sacchikatvā pavedeti. I think R. Otto Franke was on the right track when he, referring to this old formula, spoke of "*Das einheitliche Thema des Dīghanikāya*". The technical meaning of *bhagavān*, however, escaped him. And so did the precise historical context⁹.

The *sūtra* can almost be seen as a commentary on RV 10.129. It is concerned with the profound *dharma*s (10.129.1), and when it says that the *Tathāgata* himself has known these and pronounced, or taught them (to others), this is almost a direct reply to the question in 10.129.6: *kó addhā veda, ká ihā prāvocat?* The "unifying theme" of DN, in other words, is to give a reply to a celebrated line in RV 10.129.

Otherwise the *sūtra* - the *Brahmajālasūtra* - is concerned with those (ignorant) *brahman*s etc. who maintain some sixty-two theories (*dṛṣṭi*) about the soul and the world based on the notion of the past and/or the future. All such speculations (*dṛṣṭi*) are condemned by the *Tathāgata* (who has "seen for himself"), because *brahman*s etc. get entrapped and are caught in the net by them. The basic error consists in "seeing" or believing in a first or final term of anything. The truth of the matter is that there is no *pūrvānta*, no *aparānta*. A given *dṛṣṭi* always must express itself in terms of *sat/asti* or *asat/nāsti*. Since there is actually no first or final term, it is not valid to make any absolute distinction between the two, and all *dṛṣṭis* must be abolished in order to discover (*vibhāvyate*) the Profound beyond *asti* and *nasti* - the two extremes (*anta*) of *sāśvata* and *uccheda*.

Evolution

Another *sūtra* that relates to RV 10.129, also in the DN, is the *Aggañña*, available in Pāli as well as Chinese. It presents us with a cosmogonic Buddhist myth ("A Book of Genesis", Rhys Davids), the importance of which was recognised by Konrad Meisig (p. 61): "*Dunkelheit, Dichte (bzw. Enge) und Einheit gehören schon im ṛgvedischen Hymnus vom Ursprung der Welt (X 129) zusammen. Mit*

⁹ R. O. FRANKE, *Kleine Schriften*, Wiesbaden, 1978, pp. 917-1017.

eben diesen drei Eigenschaften wird der Zustand vor dem Beginn der kosmischen Emanation charakterisiert... Die in der Kosmogonie versuchte Weltergründung ist profan, weil sie die Welt aus sich selbst heraus erklärt.... Dem Mythos liegt ein zyklisches Weltbild zugrunde, er kommt deshalb ohne einen Schöpfergott aus. Die Welt hat weder Anfang noch Ende; sie dehnt sich nur aus und zieht sich wieder zusammen, sie expandiert und verdichtet sich erneut (*nivartate-saṃvartate*), über lange - aber nicht unendlich lange - Zeiträume...Dieses Weltbild ist ebenso für den Hinduismus massgeblich und im indischen Kulturkreis überhaupt vorherrschend geworden"¹⁰.

The text relates (DN III, 84-85) how *ayaṃ loko saṃvaṭṭati* and how *ayaṃ loko vivaṭṭati*. As the world passes away and evolves anew (in a cyclis without beginning and end) there are certain beings "made of mind" (*manomaya*). In the beginning there is a mass of water (*ekodakībhūtaṃ*), darkness, deep darkness. The sun and the moon do not appear, no stars and no constellations appeared, night and day were not manifest... Eventually, earth was spread out in the waters¹¹.

So here too *Tathāgata* presents himself as a Vedic scholar. No wonder that the *sūtra* introduces this piece of Vedic exegesis with words that identify *Tathāgata* with *Dharmakāya*, or *Brahmakāya*, and *Dharmabhūta* or *Brahmabhūta* (DN III, 84).

Meisig wrote (p. 61): "*Der Aggañña-Mythos behandelt eine Reihe von Fragen, die alle so unbuddhistisch wie nur möglich sind. Buddhistisch wäre die Frage nach der Erlösung*".

The opposite is, of course, true. Even Meisig himself does not question the authenticity of the archaic text found in the Buddhist canon. And how could he? So how can it be "unbuddhistisch"? Moreover, the text makes a lot of good sense once it is seen in its

¹⁰ K. MEISIG, *Das Sūtra von den Vier Ständen*, Wiesbaden, 1988.

¹¹ In spite of H. LÜDERS, *Beobachtungen über die Sprache des buddhistischen Urkanons*, Berlin, 1954, p. 81, n. I, I think that *ekodakībhūtaṃ* is related to *ekodakībhūtaṃ*.

proper context. Like so many other Buddhist texts it is concerned with issues raised in RV 10.129, and thereby, as we shall see, also with *mokṣa*.

On kāma and manas

In RV 10.129.4 we were told:

kāmas tād āgre sām avaratādhi mānaso rétaḥ prathamam yád āsīt

In the beginning *kāma* came upon that, that was the first seed of *manas*. Not only do we note that the word *sam* + *vr̥t* is used to describe the initial cosmogonic activity (as in the *Aggañña*: *saṃvaṭṭati*), but also that *kāma* and *manas* are, so to speak, the fundamental evil - i.e. from the perspective of one who wants to get back to the Profound.

The *Bṛhadāranyaka-Up.* 3.2.7 explains why: *manasā hi kāmān kāmāyate*.

In the Buddhist texts the fundamental evils are usually *tr̥ṣṇā* and *avidyā* - more or less synonyms of *kāma* and *manas*. The *Aggañña* spoke of beings consisting of *manas*, who, due to *tr̥ṣṇā*, became responsible for 'evolution'. Possibly Gautama introduced the terms *tr̥ṣṇā* and *avidyā* in this context¹².

It only takes a glance at the Buddhist dictionaries under *kāma*- and *mano/mana(s)* to conclude that these two concepts were among the most important of all in ancient Buddhism.

When the Buddha propounded his own theory of causality, *pratītyasamutpāda*, to account for the genesis of *duḥkham* (about which below) he still placed *avidyā* or *tr̥ṣṇā* at the root.

An old *gāthā* is often ascribed to the Buddha (e.g. *Prasanna-padā*, p. 350; 451):

¹² The canonical *logion* e.g. in *Nagarjuniana*, p. 147, n.21.-The term *logion* (cf. Pythagoras, Jesus!) I owe to C. A. SCHERRER-SCHAUB, *Yuktiṣaṣṭikāvṛtti*, Bruxelles, 1991, *passim*. (A very valuable work with numerous ref. also for our purpose).

*kāma, jānāmi te mūlaṃ saṅkalpāt kila jāyase /
na tvāṃ saṅkalpayiṣyāmi tato me na bhaviṣyasi //*¹³

It almost sounds like a piece of autobiography; the Buddha has finally found the *mūla* (cf. *retaḥ* above) of *kāma*, and he has found it in *saṅkalpa*, the intentional activity of mind, also a common canonical expression.

Once again, the verse (if authentic) can easily be understood as a piece of Vedic exegesis on the part of Gautama.

The final chapter of the Pali *Dhammapada* (PD) - corresponding to the first chapter of the "Gāndhārī" *Dharmapada* (GD), with numerous parallels in *Udānavarga*, *Saṃyutta*, etc. - transmits a number of verses, some of them obviously quite archaic, that are supposed by tradition to go back to the Buddha himself. Like so many other canonical texts they deal with the "true" *brahman* (*brāhmaṇa* / *brahmaṇa*).

Some of the otherwise vague or obscure verses suddenly make very good sense when seen in the perspective of RV 10.129, as suggested above. A few examples: Above all the true *brahman* should get rid of *kāma* (PD 383, 401, 415 (cf. 416); GD 9, 10, 20, 21, 33); he should know the uncreated, somehow beyond duality, the *dharma* etc., and thus get rid of *duḥkham*. And then we come to the interesting verse (PD 390 - GD 15, see Brough, p. 121):

*na brāhmaṇass' etad akiñci seyyo
yadā nisedho manaso piyehi /
yato yato hiṃsamano nivattati
tato tato sammati-m-eva duḥkham //*

I will not here take up space discussing this difficult verse to which Brough assigns a crux, but merely suggest this solution: The first part is a question: Is *etad akiñci* (= *tad ekam*) not preferable for a true *brahman*, (the state) when his *manas* (read: *hi* 'ssa *mano*) is

¹³ *Prasannapadā*, see C. A. SCHERRER-SCHAUB, *op. cit.*, p. 336 for the edition and the translations. The Buddhist sources share *saṅkalpa* with the early Upaniṣads. Very useful is V. P. LIMAYE, R. D. VADEKAR (eds.), *Eighteen Principal Upaniṣads*, Poona, 1958. I here rely heavily on the Index to words and clauses, pp. 522-748. - Also DINES ANDERSEN, *Om Brugen og Betydningen af Verbets Genera i Sanskrit*, Kjøbenhavn, 1892.

held back from pleasures? The second part is an answer: Yes, for the more his mind stops its activity, the more "suffering" ceases. (The final line is still problematic.) The verse, in brief, deals with *cittavṛttinirodha*, or *yoga*. The *manas*, responsible for *kāma*, must cease its activity before one (i.e. the *yogi(n)*) can attain *etad akiñci*¹⁴. There are other canonical verses to the same effect¹⁵. Thus *Sam. I*, 49: *nappahāya munī kāmē ekattaṃ upapajjati* has a Sanskrit parallel in *Udāna XI.1*: *nāprahāya munīḥ kāmān ekatvaṃ adhigacchati* and DP 383: *saṅkhārānaṃ khayāṃ ñatvā akataññu si brāhmaṇa* So the *akata*, *etad akiñci*, *ekattaṃ* and *ekatvaṃ* refer to the same *gahanaṃ gambhīram* and *tad ekam*, as did RV 10.129. Surely, the *vipras* speak of *ekaṃ sat* in many ways!

In PD 394 we have another case where translators not recognising the historical context seem to have read their own ideas into the text:

*kiṃ te jaṭāhi dummedha kiṃ te ajinasātiyā?
abbhantaram te gahanaṃ bāhiraṃ parimajjasi*

Here *abbhantaram* is, of course, an adjective or adverb (see CPD, s.v.), meaning "being within, inside", as opposed to *bāhiraṃ*. The "Buddha" is reminding the ignorant listener that *gahanaṃ* (= *tad ekam*, etc.) is (to be found) within, so it is foolish to be so concerned about "external appearances". Accordingly, in PD 403 the real *brāhmaṇa* is described as *gambhīrapañña* - he knows the Profound - the Profound what? - The *gahanaṃ gambhīram* of RV 10.129.1. What we are searching for, the Vedic poet told us, is to be found inside in our heart. So *abbhantaram* is an echo of *hṛdi*, as are several other terms in this chapter of PD/GD etc.

Another term that belongs to this context is *amatogadham* (PD 411), glossed by *amatabbhantaram*, and a synonym of *nirvāṇa* (cf. CPD, s.v.). It is the "depth" of *amṛta*, and as such much the same as the *gahanaṃ gambhīram*.

¹⁴ Using J. BROUGH (ed.), *The Gāndhārī Dharmapada*, London, 1962. See also F. BERNHARD (ed.), *Udanavarga*, Göttingen, 1965-68. - For *na...etad akiñci*, cf. *naiḥśreyaso dharmo gambhīro...Ratnāvalī* 1.75; and CPD s.v. *akiñcañña* (= *nibbāna*).

¹⁵ J. BROUGH, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

But how can all these terms become synonyms, more or less, of *nirvāṇa*, one of the four *satyas* of the Aryans?

The Problem of Nirvāṇa

I do not here need to recall that it has been the topic of much learned discussion and controversy. As PED, p. 362 correctly noticed under *nibbāna*, only in the older texts do we find references to a simile of the wind and the flame ...moreover, one has to bear in mind that native commentators themselves never thought of explaining *nibbāṇa* by anything like blowing (*vāta*)...

This, I suggest, is because they did not, of course, tackle the problem of *nirvāṇa* in a historical fashion. Looking for the historical origin of the term, I suggest that it has its roots in RV 10.129.2:

ānīd avātām svadhāyā tād ekam.

That One breathed, windless, by its own power¹⁶. So, whoever first coined the term *nir-vāṇa* had in mind *tad ekam*, which was likewise *a-vātām*.

I can think of no more simple or natural suggestion as to the origin of the concept of *nirvāṇa*. That the original context was later forgotten is, of course, only what one would expect.

The Brahmanical sources seem to have avoided for long the term (not the idea) *nirvāṇa* - it is not to be found in any of the eighteen principal *Upaniṣads* - until finally the author of the *Gītā* coined the term *brahma-nirvāṇa*. (II. 72). But the concept of a peaceful, serene and windless place was, as we see from the not uncommon *nivāta* (adj.) was familiar to them¹⁷.

¹⁶ One has to keep in mind the image of the primeval waters. It has not yet been disturbed by the wind, or "storm", viz. of *kāma/manas*. Later on, in yoga, *manas* is, as known, associated with wind, and *kāma* with a flood: *nasti kāmasamo hy ogho* (*Udānavarga* XXIX.37; SWTF s.v. *ogha*).

¹⁷ K. F. JOHANSSON, *Etymologisches und Wortgeschichtliches*, Uppsala, 1927, p. 36. Cf. also STIG WIKANDER, *Vayu*, Uppsala/Leipzig, 1941, p. ix: "Kein Zweifel: wenn von irgendeiner Gottheit gesagt werden kann, daß sie während der arischen Periode eine beherrschende Stellung bei den indo-arischen Stämmen eingenommen

The concept of *nirvāṇa* is intimately related, or intimately opposed, to that of *saṃsāra* - also a concept that does not yet occur in the early Vedic/Brahmanical literature. So again we have to go *ad fontes*.

The Origin of Saṃsāra

The word is usually translated as transmigration, but such a translation fails to do justice to the etymology of the word. And the ancient Indian thinkers were conscious of etymology! Nor does it make much sense to speak of transmigration without assuming any subject of transmigration, and how can one, for instance, in a compound such as *vacīsaṃsāra* (ref. in PED, s.v.), exchange of words, or in *saṃsāracakra*, speak of anything that transmigrates?

As said, the word *saṃsāra*, from *saṃ* and the root *sr̥*, flow together, does not occur as such in early literature, but in RV there is one occurrence (9.97.45) of the finite verb where a drop of *Soma* is said to flow together with milk and water. So the logic of the term *saṃsāra* requires something to flow together with something (else). There must be a least two items to make *saṃsāra*. (This fact is not suggested by "transmigration".) When he coined the term its author must have been thinking of some sort of *dvaya*, a set of two(s). We must then ask: What flows together with what?

Again we may have recourse to one of the *logia* often ascribed to *Bhagavat*: *anavarāgro hi bhikṣavo jātijarāmarāṇasaṃsārah*¹⁸. It is not here a question of the transmigration of *jātijarāmarāṇam*, birth, old age, death, but rather of life and death flowing into one another without beginning or end in time and space. Another ancient term for this constant coming and going is *ājavanjavībhāva* (e.g. *Prasannapadā*, p. 218; 529).

habe, so von Vāyu-Vāta. Und seine Geltung ist keineswegs auf die Zeiten und Länder beschränkt, die ihn unter diesem Namen gekannt haben".

¹⁸ Quoted e.g. *Prasannapadā*, p. 218. Ref. J.MAY, *op. cit.* p. 169; CPD I, p. 156; J. CHARPENTIER, *The Uttarādhyāyanasūtra*, Uppsala, 1922, p. 378.- For (an)avara-, cf. *avā-stat*, RV 10.129.5.

The idea that life (birth) and death etc. flow together without any first or final term has various important implications. No absolute distinction can be made between *sat* and *asat*, life and death.

Being mutually dependent all appearances strictly speaking "flow together". It cannot be otherwise if one takes a cyclic view of causality. It is therefore a fundamental error - a matter of *tṛṣṇā* or *avidyā* - to hang on to any absolute distinction between *sat* and *asat*. The presence of *sat* and *asat* in itself implies a longing for the original state before the manifestation of *sat* and *asat*.

To begin with, before *sat* and *asat*, the Vedic poet told us, there was, perhaps, *ambhaḥ*, water, "indistinguishable, this was all water" (10.129.1). And water may indeed flow. There was no death then, but *kāma* and *manas* became active, a storm arose, and everything, life and death, began flowing together.

Life in *saṃsāra*, in other words, is much like waves on the primeval ocean of the *gahanaṃ gabhīram*. The distinction between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, therefore, is not absolute. It does make sense when the yogic sources inform us that the unreal duality disappears in the serenity of mind.

The Original Meaning of Duḥkham

Again the word is not found in RV, even though the idea of salvation from death, the central evil, can be traced back to Vedic times. In the early *Upaniṣads* the word *duḥkham* is only found twice: *Chāndogya* 7.26.2 and *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* 4.4.14, in both cases in verses that do not seem very archaic. It is a rather artificial term, from *duḥ* and *kham*, a bad opening, or canal (for water).

Common is the expression *sarvaṃ duḥkham*. Recalling that *sarvaṃ (idam)* is a fixed term for the manifest world (RV 8. 58.2, quoted above), or developed from *ekam* (RV 3.54.8), *duḥkham* originally indicated the microcosm as opposed to or linked together

with (by means of a canal) to the macrocosm¹⁹. It is an image of the unhappy manifestation/emanation of *tad ekam*. It is therefore immediately obvious why *duḥkha(m)* later on is used to describe almost any place having to do with *saṃsāra*. When the Buddha says *sarvaṃ duḥkham*, and explains *sarvaṃ* by the five *skandhas* etc., and, furthermore, explains the five *skandhas* by the term *loka*, open space, the world of the individual, it seems fairly certain that the original notion of *duḥkham* had to do with the observation that the microcosm of the individual due to *kāma/tṛṣṇā* and *manas/avidyā*, unfortunately had been separated from the macrocosm. But there was still a "canal" that linked the two together.

The two words *duḥkham* and *saṃsāra* were conceived when the image of the primeval waters was still vivid in mind. They both suggest flowing, or emanation, the *iyam viśṛṣṭiḥ* of RV 10.129. 6, 7 – not really "creation", but emission, discharge.

No wonder then that the Buddha exhorts his students to cross the ocean of *saṃsāra*, to cut off the stream - *chinda sotam!* (from Sanskrit *srotas*). A stanza such as *Dhammapada* 218 (cor. to *Udāna* II. 9) only really becomes intelligible with this imagery in mind:

chandajāto anakkhāte manasā ca phuṭo siyā /

kāmesu ca appaṭibaddhacitto uddhamasoto 'ti vuccati //

One should swim upwards the stream to *anakkhāta* (Cf. *nirvāṇa*) suffused by *manas*, without having one's *citta* fettered to any object of *kāma*. The *anakkhāta*, ineffable, invisible (cf. Vedic *khyā* !), corresponds well to *apraketam* of RV 10.129.3, as do *kāma* and *manas*, and, of course, again, the image of flowing.

The later commentators, as one would expect, seem to be unaware of the original historical context. But the image of flowing water was very much alive to the individual who first coined the words just discussed.

As to the common expression *ekāgra(tā)*, said of *citta* (cf. CPD II, p. 583), one-pointedness, it may originally also have belonged in

¹⁹ I do not hesitate to use the terminology macrocosm/microcosm (first coined by Democritus) to express the Indian complementary pair *ekam/sarvaṃ*. On *sarvaṃ*, ref. in J. MAY, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

this context, thus meaning: having one's mind (*citta* \approx *hṛdaya/hṛd*) on *eka(m)/ agra* - on the One - the *tad ekam agre*. Since the Buddhists often use *citta* in the sense of heart, such an interpretation would fit nicely with the exhortation implicit in RV 10.129.4:....*niravindan hṛdī pratīṣyā kavāyo manīṣā*. The "truth" about *sat* and *asat* is to be found in one's heart²⁰.

On Satyam

The Buddha spoke of the truth, or truths, that he had personally realised, sometimes he spoke of only one *satyam*, that of *nirvāṇa*, but he also spoke of four Aryan truths: *duḥkham* (= *upādāna-skandha*), *duḥkhasamudaya* (= *tṛṣṇā*), *duḥkhanirodha* (= *nirvāṇa*), and the *mārga* (or *pratipad*) leading to *duḥkhanirodha*. To follow the path of the great physician meant to become perfect in *śīla*, *samādhi* and *prajñā*. He pointed out a Middle Path from *duḥkham* to its *nirodha*, i.e. from *saṃsāra* to *nirvāṇa*. It was a path between extremes, including those of *sat* and *asat*. This constituted his *dharmaśāstra*, for *dharma* has to do with *satya*²¹.

The two terms *satyam* and *dharma* are closely related. The former is Vedic, the latter is not. The true *brahman* is one in whom both are present, *Dhammapada* 393;

yamhi saccaṃ ca dharmo ca so sukhī so ca brāhmaṇo

²⁰ The later *darśanas* ("ways of looking upon (the old problems)) about *satkārya*-, *asatkārya*-, and *anekāntavāda* etc. etc. also start out with this "big problem", suggested in RV 10.129: *sat* and *asat*. Likewise in Greek philosophy (from the time of Parmenides). Cf. also *astikāya*, *satkāya*, *astibhāva*, *astivastu*, etc.

²¹ That the Buddha speaks of four truths surely has to do with the old Aryan notion of *dharma* being "four-footed" (complete). Cf. e.g. *Manu* 1.81: *catuspāt sakalo dharmah, satyam caiva kṛte yuge*. For the close relationship between (*ārya*)*satya* and (*sad*)*dharma* also *MK* XXIV.30, 40. Cf. also the common expression *catur-bhadra*. There are also four *varṇas*, *āśramas*, *saṃgrahavastus* etc. - In RV 10.121.9 the One, Unknown God is said to be *satyadharman*, cf. *Īśā-Up.* 15 (*satyadharma*).

It is, so to speak, the presence of *dharma* and *satyam* in man that links microcosm together with macrocosm. Famous are the words of *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Up.* 2.5.11-12:

ayaṃ dharmāḥ sarveṣāṃ bhūtānāṃ madhu. asya dharmasya sarvāṇi bhūtāni madhu. yaś cāyam asmin dharme tejomayo 'mṛtamayaḥ puruṣo yaś cāyam adhyātmaṃ dhārmāś tejomayo 'mṛtamayaḥ puruṣo 'yam eva sa yo 'yam ātmā. idam amṛtam idaṃ brahmedaṃ sarvaṃ.

*idaṃ satyaṃ sarveṣāṃ bhūtānāṃ madhu. asya satyasya sarvāṇi bhūtāni madhu. yaś cāyam asmin satye tejomayo 'mṛtamayaḥ puruṣaḥ yaś cāyam adhyātmam sātyas tejomayo 'mṛtamayaḥ puruṣo 'yam eva sa yo 'yam ātmā. idam amṛtam idaṃ brahmedaṃ sarvaṃ*²².

In brief: to the extent that the individual has a share of *dharma* and *satyam*, it is immortal, *Brahman*, it All. Here, again, we see that the duality between micro- and macrocosm is ultimately unreal. The duality is, literally speaking, "untrue".

An old *logion* often ascribed to the Buddha makes fine sense in this context: *etad dhi bhikṣavaḥ paramaṃ satyaṃ yad uta amoṣa-dharma nirvāṇaṃ, sarvasaṃskārāś ca mṛṣā moṣadharmāṇaḥ*²³.

When Buddhist sources - especially those of *Mahāyāna* - speak of *dve satye* this distinction corresponds to that of *dve vāva Brahmano rūpe*... There is really only one truth, the One, but it does make a difference whether one knows it or / and talks about it. In one sense *satyam* has to do with *jñāna* in another it has to do with *kriyā*; so both are aspects of the same *dharma*. One can perhaps say that *satyam* is the medium through which *dharma* is expressed. Both can be known and spoken of but *dharma* would seem to "regulate" truth(s).

²² Compare the common Buddhist expression *dharmām ṛta*, corresponding to *madhu*. Ref. C. A. SCHERRER-SCHAUB, *op. cit.*, p. 234.- For *dharman/dharma/dhārma* etc. W. WÜST, *Vergleichendes und Etymologisches Wörterbuch des alt-indoiranischen*, Heidelberg, 1935. p. 102.

²³ E.g. *Prasannapadā*, p. 41, 237. Discussion S. SCHAYER, *Ausgewählte Kapitel aus der Prasannapadā*, Kraków, 1931, p. 26. Again *satyam* (*paramam*) and *dharma(n-)* are closely related. (Correct *pralāpadharmakam* to *pralopadharmakam* ('jig pa) on p. 238, l. 1, explaining *moṣadharmakam*; cf. *viparilopa* in *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Up.*)

On Causality

Buddhist sources use the expression *ayaṃ dharmaḥ* in the sense of *pratītyasamutpāda*. This, our, Buddhist *dharma*. The purpose of teaching, or pointing out, this *dharma* is to show how *duḥkham - idaṃ sarvaṃ* - comes about as a result of *tṛṣṇā/avidyā* - the old pair *kāma/manas* - operating in a certain way, by necessity and verifiable by personal experience. It was probably the most characteristic and original feature of early Buddhism, the result of admirably independent thinking on the part of Gautama.

The vagueness or silence of RV 10.129 on causality naturally opened the path for *brahmvādins* to speculate about *kāraṇa*. The earliest Buddhist and Jaina texts are already replete with such speculations (*drṣṭi*) about the relationship between macro- and microcosm. These thinkers could not remain satisfied with the mythical account of *Brahman* (n.) giving somehow rise to Mr. *Brahmā* (m.), the *Prajāpati* who then arranged the world as we happen to know it. Our sources for the earliest period are about as tantalizing as they are often disappointing.

The Vedic texts and the early *Upaniṣads* do not yet have any clear concept of causality though the tendency to scientific thinking is very strong indeed. With Oldenberg we may here speak of "pre-scientific science".

At the time of Gautama the Indians, like the Greeks, were about to take the decisive step, from *mythos* to *logos*.

The initial verses of *Śvetāśvatara-Up.* let philosophers (*brahmavid*) search for the *kāraṇa* - is it *kāla*, *svabhāva*, *niyati*, *yadr̥cchā*, the elements, *puruṣa*, or a combination of some or all of these?

Similar lists of candidates for the post of being the sole *kāraṇa* are known from several Buddhist and Jaina sources.

Nāgārjuna, in his *Suḥṛllekha* 50, rejects these six views of causality as being false: *yadr̥cchā* ('*dod rgyal*), *kāla* (*dus*), *prakṛti* (? *rañ bzin*), *svabhāva* (*no bo ñid*), *Īśvara* (*dbañ phyug*), and *ahetuka* (*rgyu med can*).

In the Introduction to the *Akutobhayā* we find this list of wrong causes: *Īśvara* (*dbañ phyug*), *puruṣa* (*skyes bu*), *ubhaya* (*gñi ga*), *kāla* (*dus*), *prakṛti* (? *rañ bzin*), *niyati* (*ñes pa*), *pariṇāma* ('gyur ba), and *aṇu* (*rdul phra*).

The commentary to *Akṣaraśataka* 6 says ...*rañ bzin dañ, dbañ phyug dañ, rdul phra rab dañ, phyogs dañ, dus la sogs thams cad rgyu ma yin te, bltos pa'i phyir ro*.

Bhavya, in the first chapter of his *Prajñāpradīpa* mentions and rejects these "bad causes": *svabhāva*, *Īśvara*, *puruṣa*, *pradhāna* (or *prakṛti*), *kāla*, *Nārāyaṇa*, etc. His commentator, the indefatigable Avalokitavrata adds; *Brahman*, *Prajāpati*, *Manu*, *daiva*, *Druvāna* (?) of the Persians, and *Yuna* (?) of the (Greek) Barbarians²⁴.

Candrakīrti has this list: *svabhāva*, *Īśvara*, *prakṛti*, *puruṣa*, *kāla*, *Nārāyaṇa*, etc.²⁵.

Āśvaghoṣa, in his *Saundarananda* XVI.17 has : *Īśvara*, *prakṛti*, *kāla*, *svabhāva* (*vidhi*?), *yadṛcchā*... (cf. *Maitrī-Up.* VI.14-16).

It is inconceivable that some of these speculations about causality in some form should have been unknown to Gautama. As an educated intellectual and philosopher he would not have permitted himself to remain ignorant of what was going on in contemporary philosophical circles.

If we can trust our sources some of his contemporaries called *adhiccasamuppanika*, asserted that things arise fortuitously, that they are *adhiccasamuppanna*. According to the commentators (cf. CPD I, p. 132) these people held that the world and the soul come about without *kāraṇa*, or according to *yadṛcchā*. In other words, they had a doctrine of *adhītya-samutpāda*²⁶.

²⁴ See W.L. AMES, "Bhāvaviveka's *Prajñāpradīpa*", in *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 21 (1993), p. 247. - For *Suḥṛllekha* etc. I have used the Tibetan editions (Peking, Derge). Cf. also *Vaidalya* IX: *Viṣṇu*, *Śiva*, *Brahmā*, *Kapila*, *Ulūka*, *Vyāsa*, *Vasiṣṭha*, *Vyāghrabhūti* read thus!), *Gārgya* (read thus!) and *Māṭhara*; cf. F. TOLA, C. DRAGONETTI, *Nāgārjuna's Refutation of Logic*, Delhi, 1995, p. 62.

²⁵ See C. A. SCHERRER-SCHAUB, *op. cit.*, p. 108, n.18 with ref. Also the old verse: *ye dharmā hetuprabhavā hetuṃ teṣāṃ tathāgato hy avadat* (ibid., p. 117).

²⁶ See F. O. SCHRADER, *Kleine Schriften*, p. 19 and 481.

Gautama's most original contribution to the theories of the mechanics of causality was that of *pratītya-samutpāda*. Again and again our sources ascribe this *logion* to Gautama: *yaḥ pratītyasamutpādaṃ paśyati sa dharmam paśyati*²⁷.

It seems natural to assume that Gautama coined the new word *pratītya-samutpāda*, taking his clue from those who ventured to explain the origin of the world and the soul in terms of *adhītya-samutpāda*.

The four Aryan truths all had to do with *duḥkham* - what it is, how it comes about, and where and how one can become released from one's sad confinement.

One has to realise the four Aryan *satyas*, but one also has to see the *dharma* for oneself - just as the *Tathāgata* did (hence his name). The two concepts, as we saw, are not identical but they do form an old pair of twins.

Apparently the canonical sources do not know *kāraṇa*, in the sense of "ultimate cause of the world". But there can hardly be any doubt that *dharma* in the sense of *pratītyasamutpāda* was intended (in the *logion* cited above) to identify the ultimate cause and its function. Things come about in a certain way, in a strict temporal succession. Gautama himself must have felt that he had thereby had the final say in an old and long debate on causality.

It does not surprise us that Buddhist sources occasionally identify *dharma* with *Brahman*. To see *dharma* - *drṣṭe dharme*, to have understood causality²⁸ - and to know *Brahman* is to understand the ultimate cause of the world. It does make sense when the Buddha says, referring to himself, that *Brahmabhūta* is an *adhivacana* for *Tathāgata*.

²⁷ Cf. J.-U. HARTMANN, *op. cit.*, p. 218; J. MAY, *op. cit.*, p. 251 C. A. SCHERRER-SCHAUB, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

²⁸ From the context (cf. 26) *dharma* must here be = *pratītyasamutpāda*. The usual translation ("here in this life") is not very accurate.

Now and then *dharmacakra* and *brahmacakra* are used as synonyms, and in such cases *cakra* would seem to mean "cyclic causality". Likewise in the celebrated image of *saṃsāracakra*, or *saṃsāramaṇḍala*²⁹.

The Middle Path

The old formula is well-known: *ayaṃ kho sā bhikkhave majjhimā paṭipadā tathāgatena abhisambuddhā, cakkhukaraṇī, ñāṇakaraṇī, upasamāya, abhiññāya, sambodhāya, nibbānāya saṃvattati...*³⁰

The Middle Path discovered by the one who has actually followed it - this seems to be the meaning of the term *Tathāgata* (also used by non-Buddhists in a similar context) - leads to *nirvāṇa*. Other terms with the same denotation but not with same connotation, for *nirvāṇa* are given (There may be some still obscure historical reasons for this.) The two terms *paṭipadā* and *maggā* seem to be interchangeable synonyms.

Tathāgata could also have said that he had followed ("gone") the *Brahmapatha*, the *Brahmayāna*, that he was now *Brahmabhūta*, that he had lived the *Brahmacarya* etc. etc., to much the same effect.

It is true that the ambiguity of *brahma* - in compounds (deliberately meaningful in some cases, see below) can render it doubtful whether *Brahman* (n.) or *Brahmā* (m.) is actually meant. But I suppose we can be fairly sure that the Buddha would not (under normal circumstances) want to identify himself with the hilarious *Brahmā* who in the canon is depicted as *issara, kattā, nimmitā, abhibhū, pitā bhūtabhavyānam* etc. (see CPD II, p. 318)³¹.

²⁹ E. WALDSCHMIDT, *Von Ceylon bis Turfan*, Göttingen, 1967, p. 351; F. O. SCHRADER, *op. cit.*, pp. 121, 169, 310; PED. Early ref. in H. KERN, *Manual of Indian Buddhism*, Strassburg, 1896, p. 99.

³⁰ Ref. in CPD I, p. 346; and *Pāli Tipitakam Concordance*, London, 1956, c.v. *abhiññā(ya)* etc.

³¹ Early *Īśvaravāda*, cf. F. O. SCHRADER, p. 52.- When the Buddhists spoke of *aṣṭāṅgikamārga, tridoṣa, dvādaśāṅga (-nidāna)* they were, in my opinion, adopting

He *Brahmā* - is not the one *Tathāgata* has in mind when he refers to himself as *brahmabhūta*. Nor does he advise others to follow a path that leads to the comical creator *Brahmā*.

Therefore, when *Tathāgata* (subs. adj.!) indicates a path to *nirvāṇa*, the place of enlightened serenity, he points to *Brahman*. He might – as did the author of the *Gītā* (2.72) – have coined the term *brahma-nirvāṇa* for this; but for various reasons he did not. The main reason would be that he, as a reformer (not as a revolutionary) would have felt the need for a new term for an old concept, now contrite. The word *Brahman* had been so abused in his days. This is especially clear from several texts in the DN.

But if *Tathāgata* pointed out a path avoiding extremes (*anta*) - also those of *sat* / *śāśvata* and *asat* / *uccheda* - to *Brahman*, why did he not, being so concerned with RV 10.129 as we have seen he was, also speak of the newly discovered path as leading to *tad ekam*? This is, if I may say so, a good question.

In fact, he probably did. I have already pointed out a few canonical references to *ekatvam* (above), and if one consults the compounds with *eka-* in the CPD there are more. There are numerous canonical references to an *ekāyana-magga* invariably said to lead to *nirvāṇa*. Instead of translating (as the CPD does) *ekāyana* with "single (=unique) road, for one person" - a translation in direct conflict with the fact that it is eight-fold and to be followed by many - it is obviously more natural simply to translate: the path that leads to the One, viz. *nirvāṇa*. Likewise, when the *dharma* is said to leave *ekarasa*, viz. *vimukti-rasa*, it does not really mean "a single taste", but rather "the taste of the One". And in an old phrase such as *sammāsambuddhena ekadhammo akkhāto* (CPD, s.v. *eka-dhamma*) it is surely absurd to translate *ekadhamma* as "one single thing" - as if the fully enlightened Buddha had nothing else to say! It makes sense to say that the Buddha has expounded the *Dharma* that is (or is

medical terminology. Cf. e.g. R. F. G. MÜLLER, *Grundsätze altindischer Medizin*, Kopenhagen, 1951, *passim*. Also A. WEZLER, "On the Quadruple Division of the Yogaśāstra", in IT 12 (1984), pp. 289-337 (a somewhat different view).

about) the One. Terms like *ekī-bhāva*, *ekī-bhūta*, *ekodibhūta*, *ekaggabhūta*, etc. may well deserve revision in this new perspective.

The Tree of Brahman

The author of RV 10.129, to be sure, did not identify *tad ekam* with *Brahman* - at least not in plain words. But later sources invariably do so, as we have seen. A clear case is *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa* 11.2.3.1: *Brahma vai idam agre āsīt, tad devān asṛjata*. And 14.8.6.1: *āpaḥ evedam agre āsuḥ, tāḥ āpas satyam asṛjanta, satyaṃ Brahma, Brahma Prajāpatiṃ, Prajāpatir devān*.

Brahman is also imagined as the Cosmic Tree. The first reference is perhaps RV 1.24.7, q.v. Later on RV 10.81.4 asks:

kīm svid vānaṃ kā u sā vṛkṣā āsa

yāto dyāvāprthivī niṣṭatakṣūḥ ?

Which forest was it, which tree was it, from which they carved out heaven and earth? - The reply is given in *Taittirīya-Brāhmaṇa* 2.8.9.6: *Brahma vanaṃ, Brahma sa vṛkṣa āsīt. Brahman was the forest, Brahman was the tree*.

The simile, as known, recurs in *Kaṭha-Up.* 6.1-4; *Śvetāśvatara-Up.* 3. 7-9, and, based on these sources, in the *Gītā* 15. 1-3. As *avyayam* (= *amṛtam*) the tree is *Brahman*, but to the extent that the tree of *Brahman* is also *saṃsāra* one should "cut it down".

There is also a Buddhist version of this tree (e.g. pointed out by Zaehner, *Gītā*, p. 361) viz. *Saṃyutta* IV, p. 160-161. Here the point is that the fig-tree, when cut with an axe, lets its sap (*kṣīra*) flow out when it is young and tender, but not when dry, sapless and past its season. Likewise, a monk should not give rise to *rāga*, *dosa* and *moha*.

Much more interesting here is the technical term *skandha*, which can mean the trunk, stem or branching of a tree. This brings us to the celebrated *duḥkhaskandha*, the net outcome of causality. The world, individual existence, *loka*, or *duḥkham* is identified with the five *upādāna-skandhas*. There are a few Vedic occurrences of the related *skandhas* (n.) (not *skandha*) in the sense of the branching

top or crown of a tree (cf. MW, p. 1256), or "*Verästelung des Baumes*", as H. Grassmann renders it in his *Wörterbuch zum Rig-Veda* (p. 1584). So most likely *duḥkhaskandha* does not mean "mass of suffering", but rather "the branching that is *duḥkham*".

Since, as said, the five *skandhas*, the *duḥkhaskandha*, *loka*, (*idaṃ*) *sarvam*, and *duḥkham* have the same denotation in the oldest Buddhist sources it is very tempting to suggest that Gautama knew the image of the Cosmic Tree when he introduced the five *skandhas* to identify *duḥkham*. This also suggests, if true, that in his times the image of *duḥkham*, having to do with flowing, may already have been somewhat faded.

The usual translation of *upādānaskandhas* as "the (five) groups of grasping" strikes me as unsatisfactory, for the simple reason that there is no question of the *skandhas* themselves grasping anything or being grasped by anyone or anything. What is meant is rather the material and temporal manifestation, basis or substratum (as wood for fire). The term is cognate to *upādi* / *upādhi*, *upādāya*, etc. and it is thus easily intelligible why the ancient sources also distinguish between two kinds of *nirvāṇa*, one which still has a basis left in the *skandhas* (*sopadhiśeṣa*) and one which is no longer manifest in the *skandhas* (*nirupadhi-śeṣa*). It is also obvious why "everything", namely the *skandhas* etc., is said to be "on fire", and why the *skandhas* are considered impermanent and without a self. It is not that the Buddha denied an *ātman* in the sense of *Brahman*. (The term *ātman* in the sense of "living soul" may be related to RV 10. 129.2c.) *Brahman*, or *nirvāṇa*, is never (or only rhetorically) said to lack any *ātman*; it is only everything that is manifest that lacks any *ātman*, being, of course, subject to the law of *pratītyasamutpāda*.

The author of *Dhammapada* 283 was surely thinking of the Tree of *Brahman* when he wrote:

*vanaṃ chīndatha, mā rukkhā, vanato jāyati bhayaṃ
chetvā vanaṃ ca vanathaṃ ca nibbanā hottha bhikkhavo*

Of course *vana* (n.) here, as always, means forest, namely that of *saṃsāra*. (It has nothing to do with Vedic *vanas*, lust, which would spoil the image.) Likewise *Thera-Gāthā* 90 (=120) speaks of the five *skandhas* being, when fully understood, "cut off from their

root" (*chinnamūlaka*). At that point there is the end of *jātiśaṃsāra* (ibid.).

So Gautama's theory of the *skandhas* had at its root, if one may say so, the Tree of *Brahman*.

The Bhagavat Myth

So *Brahman* had two forms (*rūpa*), an immortal and a bodiless, and a mortal and bodily: The One was transcendent and immanent. There was often a good reason for leaving it *sub judice*, in compounds, whether the reference is to *Brahman* (n.) or to *Brahmā* (m.).

This notion was adopted by the Śramaṇa movements in opposition to established Brahmanism. The myth of *Bhagavat* was created.

Like *Brahman* a *Bhagavat* invariably has two forms (*rūpa*, *kāya*, etc.). *Bhagavat* became a technical term used by any creed to honour the more or less historical individual who had propounded anew an old *Dharma*. As a rule a *Bhagavat* has many predecessors. He is a *homo divinus*. It is not just later on, in *Mahāyāna*, that a distinction is made between the *rūpa*- and *dharmakāya* of the Buddha. The distinction between the two forms is inherent from the very beginning in the concept of *Bhagavat*. It applies to the Buddha, to Mahāvīra, to Kṛṣṇa (BG 9. 11), i.e. Viṣṇu, Śiva. etc. etc. A *Bhagavat*, by definition, is the object of *bhakti*³². The reason for this *bhakti* is invariably that a *Bhagavat* by way of *māyā* has let himself be incarnated in a mortal and physical frame in order to teach a path to the One to his devotees.

A *Bhagavat*, by definition, also teaches a double dharma. Kṛṣṇa spoke of an old *dvidivhā niṣṭhā* (BG 3. 3): one kind of *yoga* that had to do with *jñāna*, another that had to do with *karma*. Virtually all

³² Already in Aśoka's Seventh Rock Edict we find *daḍhabhattitā* (i.e. *ḍṛḍhabhaktitā*). The composition of *stotras/stutis* was from the very start a natural expression of *bhakti* - as was the composition of hymns to the ancient Vedic gods.

other Indian philosophers make a similar distinction, though naturally using their own terminology (*saṃjñābheda*)³³.

In the old canonical Buddhist formula *Tathāgata* is described, as *vidyā-caraṇa-saṃpanna*, in full possession of *vidyā* and *caraṇa*³⁴. The distinction between intellectual and moral perfection in a *Bhagavat* is not only common to all kinds of *Bhagavatism*, as said, but can also be seen as a reply to the old question of RV 10.129.6:

kó addhā veda, ká ihá prá vocat kúta ájātā kúta iyám viśṛṣṭiḥ?

A *Bhagavat* was one who knew the answer, he deserves *bhakti* for telling us which path to follow in order that one may discover for oneself what he himself had discovered - and others before him.

That Gautama, Mahāvīra, Kṛṣṇa, etc. were considered *Bhagavats* by their adherents is a fact, but this does not at all mean that the historical Gautama etc. considered themselves to be a *Bhagavat*. Gautama may have referred to himself as *Tathāgata* and Buddha, but did he also refer to himself as *Bhagavat*?³⁵

The Indian myth of a *Bhagavat* - God as a human preacher - is, from a phenomenological point of view, to be found in the myth of Jesus as Christ. We say Jesus Christ, just as the Buddhist texts say

³³ This was clearly recognised e.g. by the Jaina polymath Haribhadra, in his *Śāstravārtāsamuccaya* 23, q.v.

³⁴ That a *tathāgata* - the true *brahman* and *bhagavat* - was *vidyā-caraṇasaṃpanna* was not a specific Buddhist notion. It is also so in ancient jaina sources, cf. F. O. SCHRADER, *op. cit.* Likewise *Gītā* 5.18 (*vidyāvinayasampanna*) Cf. K. MEISIG, *op. cit.*, p. 166; J.-U. HARTMANN, p. 221; R. O. FRANKE, *passim*. For the formula, E. WALDSCHMIDT, *Von Ceylon bis Turfan*, p. 380. Closely related, almost synonyms in the early period: *śīla-prajñā*, *dharma-vinaya* and *sāṃkhyā-yoga, jñāna-karma*. They all refer to a *Bhagavat* who is intellectually and morally perfect.

³⁵ In other words: Gautama, Mahāvīra (even Kṛṣṇa, Kapila, etc.) were historical figures around whom the common myth of a *Bhagavat* was created. The root of this myth was not just the notion of *dve vāva Brahmaṇo rūpe* (above) but also that of a Mahāpuruṣa, traces of which are found e.g. in the *Puruṣasūkta* (RV 10.90). The "double nature" or body, is suggested in verse 5 when it says that *Virāj* is born from *Puruṣa* and *Puruṣa* from *Virāj*. He participates in *amṛta* and he sacrifices himself for the world. This idea is adopted by the Buddhists - after all *karma* and *karuṇā* are related concepts. - A visible and an invisible *kāya* of *Tathāgata* is assumed in *Brahmajāla* § 73-a precursor of *Vajracchedikā*: *ye māṇi rūpeṇa cādrākṣur.* (cf. *Dhammapada* 259). Cf. *satkāya-dṛṣṭi*, to regard the (physical) body as real.

Buddho Bhagavān. We forget the as, and thus we - if we are not historians - forget the distinction between history and myth. But *mundus vult decipi*!

Jesus as Christ, however, is another story, i.e. a myth. I am sure that future research will also make it a very long story!

The Formation of Tattvam

We have seen that the concept of a double *Brahman* / *Bhagavat* symbolizes the same "unity in everything", that makes it rather easy to understand why there is no absolute difference between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. One distinction has to do with "persons", another with "principles".

In his *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā* 5-6, Nāgārjuna, a learned Sanskritist with an extensive knowledge of Buddhist as well as Brahmanical lore, wrote:

saṃsāraṃ caiva nirvāṇaṃ manyante 'tattvadarśinaḥ /
na saṃsāraṃ na nirvāṇaṃ manyante tattvadarśinaḥ //
nirvāṇaṃ ca bhavaś caiva dvayam etan na vidyate /
parijñānaṃ bhavasyaiva nirvāṇam iti kathyate //

So, in the perspective of *tattvadarśana* / *parijñāna* the distinction between *saṃsāra* (*bhava*) and *nirvāṇa* - the duality, *dvaya* - is not valid. In this there is nothing new. But what is new is the word *tattvam*, which in later literature is extremely common, especially in compounds such as *tattvajñāna*, *tattvadarśana* and the like.

But what does *tattvam* really mean? What does one see or know when one sees or knows *tattvam*? According to the standard dictionaries and translations, it means "that-ness", truth, reality. The word, to be sure, is not Vedic.

I think there are at least two good reasons to reject this "etymology", "that-ness".

First of all, if *tat-tvam* means "that-ness" we should ask: "that-ness" of what? The context requires a genitive to express the possessive relationship. It is not clear what "that" is, and what "that"

is said to be. There is no such relationship when we speak of *tattvajñāna*, *tattvadarśana*, etc.

Secondly, the word *tattvam* apparently does not occur in the early sources. It is not Vedic and if I am not mistaken it is not to be found in the early canonical texts of Buddhism and Jainism. This is significant.

We must ask when the term *tattvam* was introduced, *why*, *where* and exactly in what sense.

As far as I can see the word first occurs in later *Upaniṣads* such as *Muṇḍaka* (1), *Kaṭha* (2), *Śvetāśvatara* (3), and *Maitrāyaṇī* (4). The context invariably presumes that the reader is already familiar with the meaning of the term. A translation such as "that-ness" would not make any sense to the reader in any of these early contexts.

These later *Upaniṣads* presuppose knowledge of the early *Chāndogya* and I think it is here we have to look for the clue to the formation of *tat-tvam*. Here (VI.8.7; 9.4; 10.3; 13.3; 15.3; 16.3) we find the celebrated phrase: *sa ya eṣo 'ñimaitadātmyam idaṃ sarvaṃ tat satyaṃ, sa ātmā, tat tvam asi Śvetaketo iti; bhūya eva mā bhagavān vijñāpayatv iti*.

Here a *Bhagavat* identifies micro- and macrocosm by saying that *tat* is one with *tvam*, that object and subject are somehow not really different. This great passage, repeated six times, would have been so familiar to the reader of the later *Upaniṣads* that it would have been immediately obvious that *tattvam* was formed on the basis of *tat tvam asi*. It thus means identity, namely the identity of *tat* and *tvam*, what in Buddhist terminology becomes *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. There is no *dvaya* between the two in *tattvam*, i.e. when one, in one's heart (*hṛdi*) knows the two as one, the One.

As we can see from other compounds such as *ahaṃkāra*, *mamakāra*, *ahamahamikā*, *idaṃpratyayatā*, etc. it was not at all uncommon in those days and in those circles to use pronouns for the formation of a substantive with a specific philosophical meaning.

So *tattvam* is a synonym of *ekatvam* and *advayam*. It simply means identity, and it was introduced into Buddhism by *brahmins* who adopted it from their own tradition. By extension, the meaning

"identity" is still apparent in later compounds such as *tattvānyatva*, a synonym of *ekatvānyatva*. Even here it does not mean "that-ness", truth or reality, but identity, unity (as opposed to duality, difference). It is a new word for the old *ekatvam*, but the connotation is a bit different because *ekatvam* has a somewhat wider range of meaning. The word *tattvam* primarily belongs to an epistemological context, the word *ekatvam* to an ontological.

So when later Buddhist *ācāryas*, writing in Sanskrit, used the term *tattvam*, they introduced a new word without canonical authorisation. But the idea was not new³⁶.

Likewise, when Mahāyāna identified *tattvam* with *sūnyatā* it was in a way quite conservative. According to RV 10.129.3, in the beginning *tad ekam* was covered with the void (*tuchya*). So everything was void, or empty, all along. Emptiness is the "ultimate" truth. There is also a "relative" truth, one of the terms for which is *saṃvṛti-satyam*. Buddhist authors who wrote in Sanskrit understood *saṃvṛti* (from *saṃ* and the root *vṛ*) as meaning "completely covering" and the like. According to RV 10.129.3, in the beginning *tad ekam* was covered (*apihitam*) by the void. Thus at least one

³⁶ In fact the early sources may have known the expression *tat tvam asi*, but avoided it as silly *bāladharma*; I think F. O. SCHRADER, *op. cit.*, p. 300 was right in taking *so loko so attā* as a paraphrase of *tat tvam asi*. How can the *attā* be *loko* when one has to live *brahmabhūtena attanā*? (ibid., p. 121). Cf. also the old expression about seeing/touching *dharma* with the body; H. LÜDERS, p. 162. -There are various ways to *brahmasahavyatā* (see *Saddanīti*, p. 417). It is ridiculous to say: *aham asmi Brahmā*... The *Tevijja* (in DN) makes it clear that it was the common ideal in those times to "see Brahma", i.e. to find a *mārga* to *sahavyatā* with *Brahmā/Brahman*. The Buddha is just one of those who offer such a *mārga*.

The old canonical passage: *attā te, purisa, jānāti saccaṃ vā yadi vā musā, sakkhi* (cf. H. KERN, *op. cit.*, p. 68, n. 8) could perhaps be understood as a "reply" to RV 10.129.7. Likewise the celebrated verse cited e.g. *Prasannapadā*, n. 354 about *ātman* as *sākṣin* (= *adhyakṣa* of RV!). The verse on p. 355: *nāstīha sattva ātmā vā*... does not deny *ātman* as *sākṣin*, but as being present as an empirical entity, here in the objective world. This suggests that Gautama accepted the "existence" of an *ātman*, a "witness" to real and unreal, itself, like *vijñāna* (DN I, p. 223), *ananta*, *anidarśana*, effulgent etc. Cf. *Śvetāśvatara-Up.* 6.11; *Gītā.* 9. 18.

As for *tattva* note the remark in the *Mahābhāṣya*; *tad api nityaṃ yatra tattvaṃ na viḥanyate*. Quoted in H. JACOBI, *Kleine Schriften*, Wiesbaden, 1970, p. 686, n. 1.

fundamental aspect of the *Mahāyāna satyadvaya-vibhāga* can be traced back to RV 10.129.3³⁷.

In a previous paper, written from an entirely different point of view, I came to the conclusion (not without being hypothetical) that "pre-canonical" or "original" Buddhism, that of Gautama, conceived *nirvāṇa* as a place, literally speaking, that a yogin could travel to³⁸. I did not then recognise the enormous influence of the Vedic and Brahmanical tradition on early Buddhism. It is now becoming more and more clear that cosmogonic speculations and Vedic exegesis were vital and formative for Gautama's way of thinking. He was concerned with *tad ekam* beyond *sat* and *asat*. Not being limited by time and space it could be "gone to" by yogic cognition.

This is not to say that (early) Buddhism is Brahmanism. On four major points the Buddhists - and the Jains - rejected Brahmanism. These four points are summed up in a historically accurate way by Dharmakīrti in the final verse of the first chapter of his *Pramāṇavārtika* (340):

*vedāpṛamāṇyaṃ kasyacit kartṛvādah
snāne dharmecchā jātivādāvalepaḥ /...*³⁹

The authority of the Veda, the doctrine of a creator of the world, the conviction that rituals can cause moral purity, and the haughtiness based on claims of birth - on these points Buddhism has always rejected Brahmanism. Likewise, according to an earlier and very well-informed source - the *Viśeṣastava* (73) of *Udbhaṭasiddhasvāmin* - people say that the Buddhists "hate the gods, the *brahmins* and the Veda"⁴⁰.

³⁷ Cf. my paper "Atiśa's Introduction to the Two Truths, and its Sources", in *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 9 (1981), pp. 161-214.

³⁸ See my "Nāgārjuna and the Problem of Precanonical Buddhism", in *Religious Studies* 15-17 (1992-1994), pp. 112-136.

³⁹ On these four "marks", see P. S. JAINI's fine paper "*Śramaṇas: Their Conflict with Brahmanical Society*", in J. W. ELDER (ed.), *Chapters in Indian Civilization*, Dubuque, Iowa, 1970, pp. 39-81.

⁴⁰ This very interesting text was edited and translated by J. SCHNEIDER, *Der Lobpreis der Vorzüglichkeit des Buddha*, Bonn, 1993. Verse 59 alludes to Manu 4. 80. "Unter den Göttern kritisiert der Text u.a. Śiva, Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa, Brahman (i.e. Brahṁā), und Indra-Śakra. An Philosophien kennt der Autor u.a. das Sāṃkhya,

Apart from that ancient Indian Buddhism should be seen as reformed Brahmanism.

If he were to address himself to a modern Jewish, Christian or Moslem audience, i.e. to the "Abrahamic religions" an ancient Indian Buddhist *ācārya* would have to admit that he did not like the Bible (Koran), the priesthood, their rituals and the God they hail as the Creator⁴¹.

aber auch Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, Mīmāṃsā und Vedānta sind dem Verfasser nicht unbekannt. Von den nichthinduistischen Religionen findet der Jinismus Erwähnung" (p. 12, n. 7).

⁴¹ Ref. to Pārasīka are common in Buddhist and Brahmanical literature. The first (and only) ref. to Moslems that I know of is to be found in Avalokitavrata's commentary to *Prajñāpradīpa* (*mu sul man*).